

4. STORKS PREYING ON LIVE BIRDS

In 1969, I had been informed by Shri V. S. Saxena the then Divisional Forest Officer, Bharatpur, that Blacknecked Storks (*Xenorhynchus asiaticus*) capture and eat coot; one of our shikaris confirmed this, but I found it hard to believe.

In April 1973 during the fag end of our Bird Migration camp. I twice observed Blacknecked Storks hunting down diving coot in shallow water which they captured and swallowed whole. On a third occasion another stork of the same species snapped up a flying coot out of a group it flushed while skimming over the water.

At the same period Adjutant Storks (*Leptoptilos dubius*) and Blacknecked Storks were seen walking down flightless injured ducks which could not dive away in the foot or two of water remaining. The victims were invariably snapped up by the neck, and shaken till dead and swallowed whole.

BNHS BIRD MIGRATION CAMP,
BHARATPUR,
RAJASTHAN,
December 10, 1973.

JAMSHED D. PANDAY

5. BREEDING OF THE LESSER FLAMINGO, *PHOENICONAIAS MINOR* (GEOFFROY) IN KUTCH

(With two photographs)

In 1945 I wrote in THE BIRDS OF KUTCH: "Lester's (1903) presumption that it [Lesser Flamingo] breeds in Kutch has not been confirmed. So far it is not known to breed within Indian limits at all." Later (1954), in my paper on the birds of Gujarat (*JBNHS* 52:384) I recorded as follows: "Between 25 February and 2 March 1946, enormous concentrations roughly estimated as close on a hundred thousand birds [! ?] with no admixture of *ruber*, were observed on the flat muddy expanse of the shallow Banas River near its mouth (opposite Dhutari Bet) in the Little Rann of Kutch. The species has so far not been found breeding within Indian limits, but there seems high probability of its doing so in the Great or Little Rann. The gathering here included numerous birds in the brown postjuvenile plumage, perhaps not more than 2 or 3 months old, which could well be from this undiscovered breeding ground." Sustained enquiry in the intervening years of likely persons living in Kutch and visitors to the suspect areas had failed to elicit any positive evidence, and the question of whether, and where, the Lesser Flamingo breeds in the Rann remained baffling.

It is thus of particular interest to record that on a recent visit to 'Flamingo City' off Nir in the Great Rann (January 24, 1974) with Shri Shivraj Kumar Khachar of Jasdan and Shri Ramsinhji Rathod, DFO Kutch, we were finally rewarded with firsthand proof of the species breeding within Indian limits. Water conditions in the Rann and logistics of our expedition to the colony were more or less identical with those recorded in my note "Flamingo City re-visited" in March 1960 (*JBNHS* 57:413-15) and need not be recounted. After the heavy monsoon inundation the edge of the Rann was still wet and boggy and impassable for jeeps, so—as on the previous occasion—we motored from Khavda to Kuran (c. 15 km) and then transferred to camel-back. The route to Nir lay along the stony base of the Kala Dongar hills across rocky hummocks and dry stony water courses, sparsely scattered with *Euphorbia*, *Salvadora*, *Zizyphus* and *Prosopis* scrub. The distance from Kuran to Nir, said to be c. 22 km, took 4½ hours of merciless pounding in some of the most uncomfortable saddles ever designed! The distance from our bivouac at Nir to Flamingo City, approximately 10 km, was covered on the same mounts in 2½ hours next morning, over alarmingly slithery slush alternating with shallow brine and stretches of billiard-table flat dry compacted sand. Owing to abnormally heavy monsoon rains in northwestern Gujarat in the 1973 season, the Great Rann had been deeply inundated by the Luni River and the water level in the Flamingo City area apparently did not become favourable for nesting till late October or early November. Dr. Philip Kahl, who is making a comparative study of all the flamingo species of the world, flew over the breeding ground on 15 November and took the accompanying aerial photographs to support his visual estimate of 10,000 nests in the two sectors of the City. On these he was able to count 7132 nests in occupation. The majority of birds were apparently the larger species, and he found no indication that the few Lesser Flamingos present among them were engaged in any breeding activity. As the nesting had apparently begun only a short while before, Dr. Kahl felt that the numbers would increase as water conditions improved, and he suggested our visiting the place a couple of months later to check the position.

As our camelcade neared the 'City' the sight, as usual, grew increasingly breath-taking. The muffled 'roar' of the birds in the distance sounded exceedingly like the continuous grind of some mighty electric generator in action. Through binocular could be marked down on the horizon at least three other separate, fairly large, breeding colonies between the traditional Flamingo City and Bhanjda Bet, towards the east and south. I have no recollection of these colonies from my previous visits, and it may be that they are new extensions. They were too far to give any idea of size, but seemed well populated. Flamingo City itself

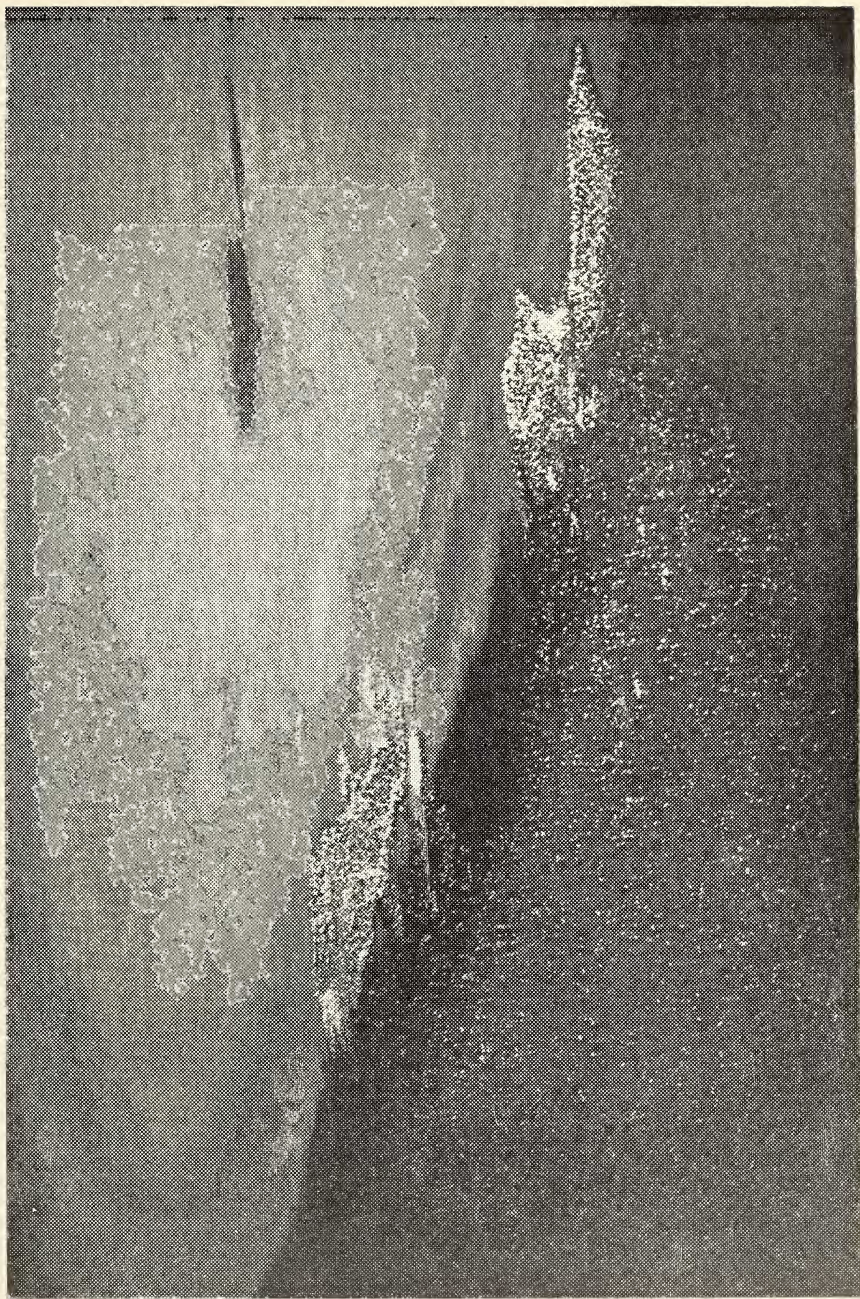


Photo 1. Flamingo colony — Great Rann of Kutch — 15 Nov. 1973,
(photographed from the NE).
(Photo: M. P. Kahl)

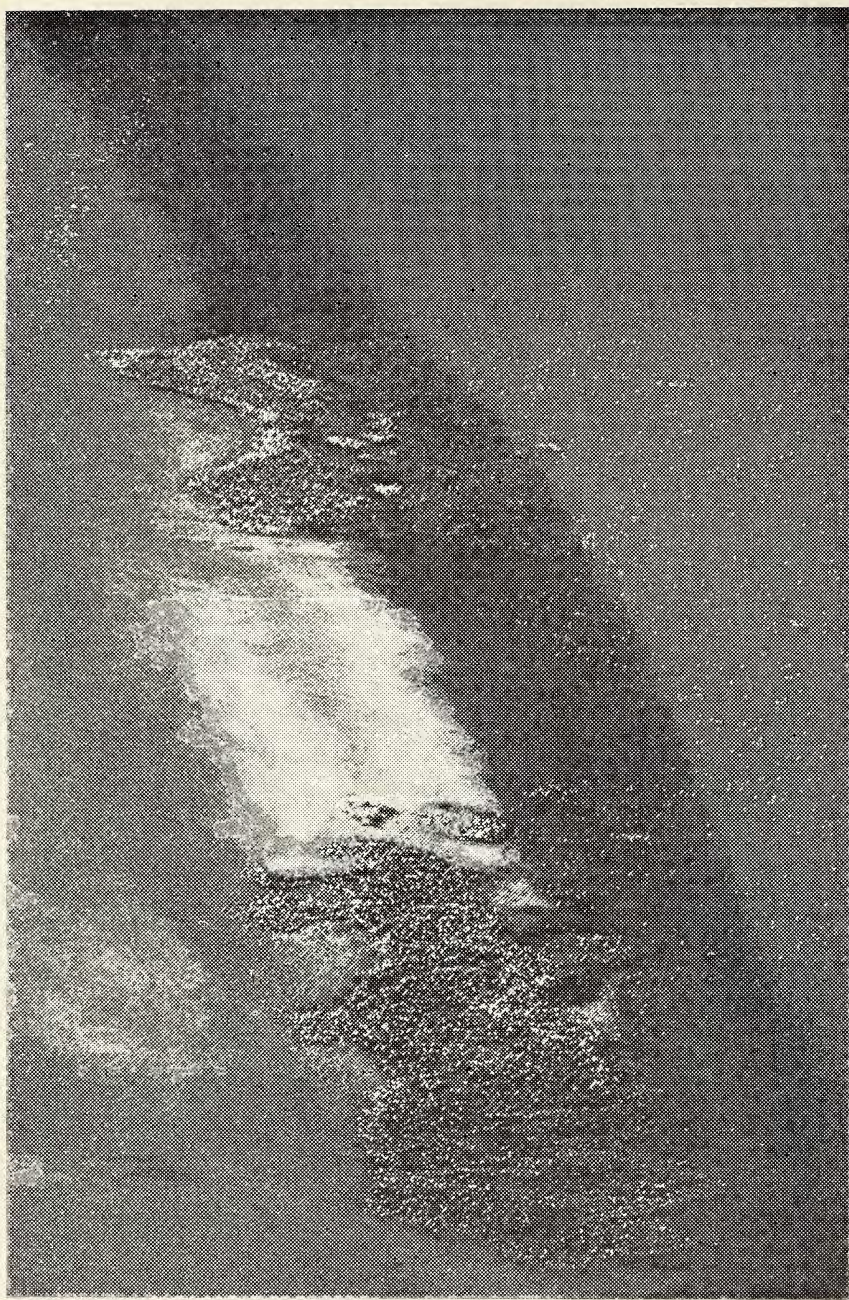


Photo 2. Flamingo colony — Great Rann of Kutch — 15 Nov. 1973,
(photographed from the S).

Counts from photo show approx. 4856 nests in "south colony" (nearest camera)
& 2272 nests in "north colony" (top of photo), for a total of approx. 7132 nests.

(Photo: M. P. Kahl)